

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3604

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS : EAID, TN, WS, FJ
SUBJECT : PEACE CORPS UNITS

REF: STATE 163959

1. WHILE A MEMBER OF CONGRESS AND THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, I PARTICIPATED IN THE PREPARATION OF THE LEGISLATION THAT ESTABLISHED THE PEACE CORPS, AND THROUGHOUT THE INTERVENING YEARS, I HAVE FOLLOWED AND SUPPORTED THE PEACE CORPS PROGRAM. SINCE MY APPOINTMENT AS AMBASSADOR, MY EMBASSY HAS ADMINISTERED ONE OF THE LARGEST PEACE CORPS OPERATIONS IN THE WORLD, AND DURING THE PAST THREE YEARS I HAVE VISITED WITH THE DIRECTORS AND VOLUNTEERS IN FIJI, TONGA AND WESTERN SAMOA AT LEAST TWICE ANNUALLY. CONSEQUENTLY, COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS THAT FOLLOW ARE MADE WITH AN INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORK OF THE PEACE CORPS IN MY AREA, AND WITH THE HOPE THAT ITS FUTURE OPERATION WILL BE SO CONDUCTED THAT IT CONTINUES TO BE OF VALUE TO THE HOST COUNTRIES AND, AT THE SAME TIME, BRINGS CREDIT TO THE UNITED STATES.

2. THE PEACE CORPS IN FIJI, TONGA AND WESTERN SAMOA HAS
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HAD A HISTORY OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS. THIS HAS BEEN DUE PRIMARILY TO UNTRAINED MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL IN THE UNITS AND THE COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS THAT ARE CAUSED BY VAST DISTANCES AND POOR TRANSPORTATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC. IN AN EFFORT TO ALLEVIATE THESE PROBLEMS, MY STAFF OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE INDIVIDUAL UNITS AND WITH PEACE CORPS

WASHINGTON. TOGETHER THEY HAVE DEVELOPED TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR PEACE CORPS FSL ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TROUBLE SHOOTING IN THE ISLANDS. THE RESULTS HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGING, AND I BELIEVE THAT PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON IS PLEASED WITH THE PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE.

3. I HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN, HOWEVER, IN CONNECTION WITH THE VERY RAPID GROWTH OF THE UNITS IN THE PAST YEAR, BOTH FROM THE STANDPOINT OF OUR ABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE AND SUPPORT THEM, AND THE ABILITY OF THE ISLANDS TO ABSORB THEM. THE ESTIMATES FOR FY 1977 AND FY 1978 INDICATE AN INCREASE IN FIJI OF 70 PER CENT, TONGA 40 PER CENT AND WESTERN SAMOA 20 PER CENT. IN ADDITION, A NEW UNIT IS SCHEDULED TO BE OPENED IN THE COOK ISLANDS THAT WILL ALSO BE ADMINISTERED FROM WELLINGTON.

4. TO MEET THE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE OF A GROWING WORKLOAD, EMBASSY WELLINGTON HAS TRAINED A SECOND FSLE IN PEACE CORPS ADMINISTRATION. ALSO, PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON HAS INDICATED ITS WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR AN ADDITIONAL SLOT IF EA/EX CAN SORT OUT THE MECHANICS OF ESTABLISHING A POSITION. IF THIS IS DONE, WE ARE CONFIDENT WE CAN HANDLE THE GROWING WORKLOAD FROM A MANAGEMENT STANDPOINT.

5. BUT THE PROBLEM OF ABSORBING LARGE INCREASES IN PEACE CORPS PERSONNEL IN THESE SMALL ISLAND NATIONS IS, IN MY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OPINION, A MUCH MORE SERIOUS MATTER. BECAUSE THE FRAGILE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF THESE ISLANDS DO NOT LEND THEMSELVES EASILY TO SUPPORT A LARGE NUMBER OF EXPATRIATE ASSISTANCE PERSONNEL, PEACE CORPS PRESENCE IN THE ISLANDS, EVEN UNDER THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, HAS A HIGH PROFILE. INCREASES IN PERSONNEL WILL CERTAINLY MAGNIFY THEIR PRESENCE AND CONSEQUENTLY THEIR VISIBILITY. EARLIER THIS YEAR CRITICISM WAS LEVELED AT THE PEACE CORPS BY THE FIJI PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION FOR USURPING CIVIL SERVICE POSITIONS FROM ALLEGEDLY EQUALLY WELL-QUALIFIED FIJIANS. AND IN AN UNCONNECTED CONVERSATION, FIJI'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN REMARKED TO MY CHARGE IN SUVA THAT IT IS NOT IN THE INTEREST OF EITHER COUNTRY THAT THE PEACE CORPS VISIBILITY BECAME TOO HIGH. OF SIMILAR CONCERN BUT MORE TRAGIC IN ITS CONSEQUENCE, THE MURDER IN TONGA LAST OCTOBER OF A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER AND THE SUBSEQUENT TRIAL OF ANOTHER VOLUNTEER FOR THE MURDER HAS MADE THE PROFILE OF EVERY VOLUNTEER THERE EVEN MORE OBVIOUS.

6. WITH RESPECT TO EFFECTIVENESS AND VALUE, I THINK THAT THE PROGRAMMING IS SOUND, THE GREAT MAJORITY OF PEACE

CORPS VOLUNTEERS DO A GOOD JOB AND THEIR WORK IS GENERALLY APPRECIATED BY THE HOST GOVERNMENTS. USING PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS ENABLES THE GOVERNMENTS TO ACHIEVE SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS IN SOME CASES (E.G. SECONDARY EDUCATION) AND PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS OFTEN CAN BE USED IN LIEU OF LOCAL CIVIL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

SERVICE PERSONNEL. CERTAINLY BOTH WESTERN SAMOA AND FIJI WILL TAKE AS MANY PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN THESE CATEGORIES AS THEY CAN GET. THIS RECEPTIVITY IN ITSELF,

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HOWEVER, SHOULD NOT BE SUFFICIENT JUSTIFICATION FOR ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEERS. AS WE HAVE SEEN IN FIJI, A HIGH LEVEL OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN SPECIFIC SEGMENTS OF THE ECONOMY MAY EXPOSE OR HEIGHTEN LOCAL SENSITIVITIES ABOUT WHICH THE HOST GOVERNMENTS THEMSELVES WERE EITHER NOT ESPECIALLY CONCERNED OR EVEN AWARE. THE HOST GOVERNMENTS, PARTICULARLY IN TONGA AND WESTERN SAMOA, WORK CLOSELY WITH THE UNITS, AND SUPPORT IS GENERALLY GOOD. THE GOVERNMENTS AND UNITS ARE WORKING WELL TOGETHER IN EXAMINING POSSIBLE NEW PROGRAMS AND SHIFTS IN EMPHASIS-- PARTICULARLY REPROGRAMMING PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS.

7. ALL OF THE UNITS ARE AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION. PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN HEAVILY CONCENTRATED IN POPULATION CENTERS, WHICH INCREASES THEIR VISIBILITY AND POTENTIAL FOR PROBLEMS. I HAVE CONSISTENTLY URGED THAT ADDITIONAL ATTENTION BE GIVEN TO THIS IMPORTANT PROBLEM AREA AND WOULD AGAIN RECOMMEND THAT IT BE CAREFULLY REVIEWED.

8. IN SUMMARY, THE PEACE CORPS HAS BEEN WELL RECEIVED
IN THE THREE ISLAND NATIONS FOR WHICH I AM RESPONSIBLE,
AND OUR ABILITY TO SUPPORT AND MANAGE THEM FROM WELLINGTON
HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVED. YET I FEEL STRONGLY THAT
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WE MUST RESIST THE EASY CONCLUSION THAT IF A REASONABLE
NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS HAVE DONE A GOOD JOB, MORE WILL
AUTOMATICALLY DO A BETTER ONE. I DO NOT BELIEVE IT WILL
BE IN OUR OVERALL BEST INTEREST TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION
THAT UNITED STATES ASSISTANCE PERSONNEL ARE OVERWHELMING
THESE TINY ISLANDS, OR TAKING OVER THEIR INSTITUTIONS, OR
TAKING JOBS FROM LOCAL CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEES.
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